

## HISTORY OF GURNET

THE GURNET by Herbert R. Boardman.

In his poem "The Courtship of Myles Standish" Henry Wadsworth Longfellow immortalizes the Gurnet as he describes the scene presented by the deserted Pilgrims gathered on the bluff to watch the departing ship.

"Rounded the point of the Gurnet and leaning far to the southward Island and cape of sand, and the field of the first encounter, Took the wind on her quarter, and stood for the open Atlantic, Borne on the send of the sea, and the swelling hearts of the Pilgrims."

The colony gradually developed and the solitary rock on the shore became the corner stone of the nation. Whether or not the Pilgrims visited the Gurnet is not known. It is quite possible that exploring parties landed there from time to time and that the abundance of clams which gave Saquish its name proved a boon to them. However, they did name the place "Gurnet". The name first appears in Winslow's Relation, printed in England in 1622 and it is supposed to mean a sort of fish having the same shape as the peninsula. It is also claimed that a promontory in Plymouth, England where the

Pilgrims had sojourned before their voyage, gave our promontory its name. The early settlers called it "The Gurnet's Nose" and the long strand connecting it to the mainland they called "Salt Horse Beach". It became legally a part of Ply-

mouth on January 7, 1638. In 1694 it was sold to John Doten, John Nelson and Samuel Lucas. Although Plymouth grew and spread, the Gurnet, save for an occasional exploring party in the shallow under Myles Standish, again lapsed into an extended period of historic obscurity, from which it did not awaken until well into the 18th century, when the first settlers came and began to cut away the pine forest.

Samuel Adams Drake in his book on the "New England Coast" states that one family owned a farm there for many generations.

This family was undoubtedly the Burgess family, who appear to have been the earliest settlers on both the Gurnet and Saquish where the homesteads they built were still standing until well into the 20th century. It is thought that the lighthouses were established about 1710 and the farmhouse was built of native timber by the Burgess family about 1720. The original house was much smaller than at present. Some authorities claim the house was built in 1752. The first lighthouses to be established and built by the Province and erected in 1768 and the first lighthouse keeper, officially speaking, was Thomas Burgess. The lighthouse keepers for over a century include Thomas Burgess, Joseph Burgess, Thomas Treble, William Sears, Milton Reamy, Edward Gorham, Henry Pingree and Alfred Eisner.

In 1776, during the Revolutionary War, a fort was built by the surrounding towns having six guns from six to 12 pounds calibre, and a garrison of 60 men maintained until the close of the war. The lighthouses were burned in 1801 and rebuilt in 1803.

The War of 1812 brought stirring days to the Gurnet. During the war period 1812-1815, there were English frigates cruising about and there was a small battery fort at the mouth of Bluefish River in Duxbury guarded the shipping there in order to protect it from raids. In those days, Duxbury was a prominent ship-building town.

The fort at the Gurnet with its brick magazine, was mounted with at least two guns of 42 pounds calibre and garrisoned a number of State troops. A fleet of alarm boats called the row guard plied between the Gurnet and Plymouth Beach. They were to give the alarm of any expedition from the frigates.

A bonfire was lighted on Captain's Hill, South Duxbury. This being taken up by signal stations in Plymouth and Kingston served to call the Minute Men from the surrounding countryside. The militiamen at Gurnet on one occasion sank a British vessel which came within gun shot.

Another thrilling event probably visible from the Gurnet during the War of 1812 was the naval battle between the ships "Chesapeake" and "Shannon" off Brant Rock, June 1, 1813, which brought forth the famous words of Capt. Lawrence of the defeated American frigate, "Don't give up the ship!" History books state the battle was fought off Salem and Marblehead but it was so far out as to be practically abreast of Marshfield as well. Further up the coast during this war occurred the well known hoax when the maid Becky Bates and her girl companion marched up and down behind Scituate Sand

Hills playing on a fife and drum in order to deceive the sailors on the English frigates offshore into thinking an army drilled by the seacoast.

The soil of the Gurnet was hallowed many times by the footprints of the great Daniel Webster, who lived in Marshfield during the last 20 years of his life (1832-1852). Webster came to the Gurnet many times on gunning trips and loved the place. He sometimes pitched his tent near the ocean front on land owned by the author, just south of Manson's cottage. But as a rule he stopped at Harvey Ransome's little cottage located on the rocks on the bay side. It has been enlarged since then and moved back. It is owned and occupied summers by Mr. and Mrs. James Watson. Webster loved Duxbury Beach and was instrumental in having wooden breakwaters built between the dunes for protection. One of his biographers speaks of his drives along the beach in the summer of 1849 and it is said he brought Lord Ashburton to the Gurnet in 1842.

The great Gurnet romance dates from the War of 1812.

According to tradition, Captain Thomas Burgess, light house keeper, had a 16-year-old daughter, Eunice, who fell in love with Sergeant Ripley, a soldier at the fort. He forbade his daughter to marry the young man and the lovesick couple made a suicide pact. They were to sit upon the loftiest rock on the ocean front where they had spent so many stolen moments and let the tide wash them out to sea. The tide rose and swirled angrily around the base of the rock, Eunice dramatically jumped and was drowned. Her less heroic lover

stood like a Casabianca- but on a rock, not a deck. Her father in an excess of grief, declared he would not object to the marriage of any of his daughters, even if they chose a Negro. As to the authenticity of this legend we cannot attest, but evidently something occurred as there were people living in recent times who claimed to have attended the funeral of the unfortunate Eunice. We have no record of what happened to the unfaithful soldier. However, the great boulder is still prominent on the rocky portion of the beach, it is a great rendezvous of lovers and is known as "Lovers Rock".

Captain Burgess, the stern parent, was a very ugly man and easily identified by the thrum cap he habitually wore. He was born and he also died at Saquish - presumably in the old Burgess home, a typical Cape Cod dwelling which stood until the early part of the century after which it went to rack and ruin.

Captain Tom's son, Joe Burgess, lived in the Gurnet farmhouse. There appears to be only two families in this section, the Burgess family on the Gurnet and Saquish and the Watson family on Clark's Island. There seems to be some connection between the Burgess family and Nancy Hanks, Lincoln's mother.

One amusing anecdote picked up at Plymouth in 1859 by Henry D. Thoreau concerns a certain General Winslow who went with a party of friends to the Gurnet to make whoopee. When it came time to go back to the main land the general had succumbed. His friends, for a trick, departed without him. When the general awoke and found himself forsaken, he lost no time in riding his horse to Saquish, he then swam his



horse to Plymouth Beach. His friends were taking the round-about route up the beach, through Marshfield, Duxbury and Kingston. Imagine their surprise at finding him in Plymouth on their arrival!

In 1842 the final pair of twin lighthouses were erected, one of which still stands. From about 1840 to 1869 a dance hall and cafe known as "Old Sebastopol" stood at the Gurnet, which was a popular resort for the people of Plymouth. This building was afterwards moved to Green Harbor, where it still stands

as a summer hotel - The Riverside House.

All this time the farm was owned and occupied by Joseph Burgess, who finally deeded the farm to Leander Lovell on April 17, 1852. This occurred a few months before the death of Webster and thus the Gurnet property passed out of the Burgess family.